LOCAS

LUCAS

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Lucas. Cover By **Sukhbir Purewal.** Written And Illustrated By **David Murdoch**

Special Thanks. Sukhbir, an amazing talent, helping me get this thing started and sticking around through the rest of it. David Igo of SatelliteSoda.com, pushing me forward.

A mid-summer day chokes the back-country farmland. Everything is warm and copper. Three shots of dry grass and dying trees, one fading into the next, frame a house in the distance.

A scream, maybe one hundred miles away. It's weak. The kind of scream that's disorentation, mixed in with a little sobbing. Whatever is going on, whatever it is and whoever is doing it, they're alone.

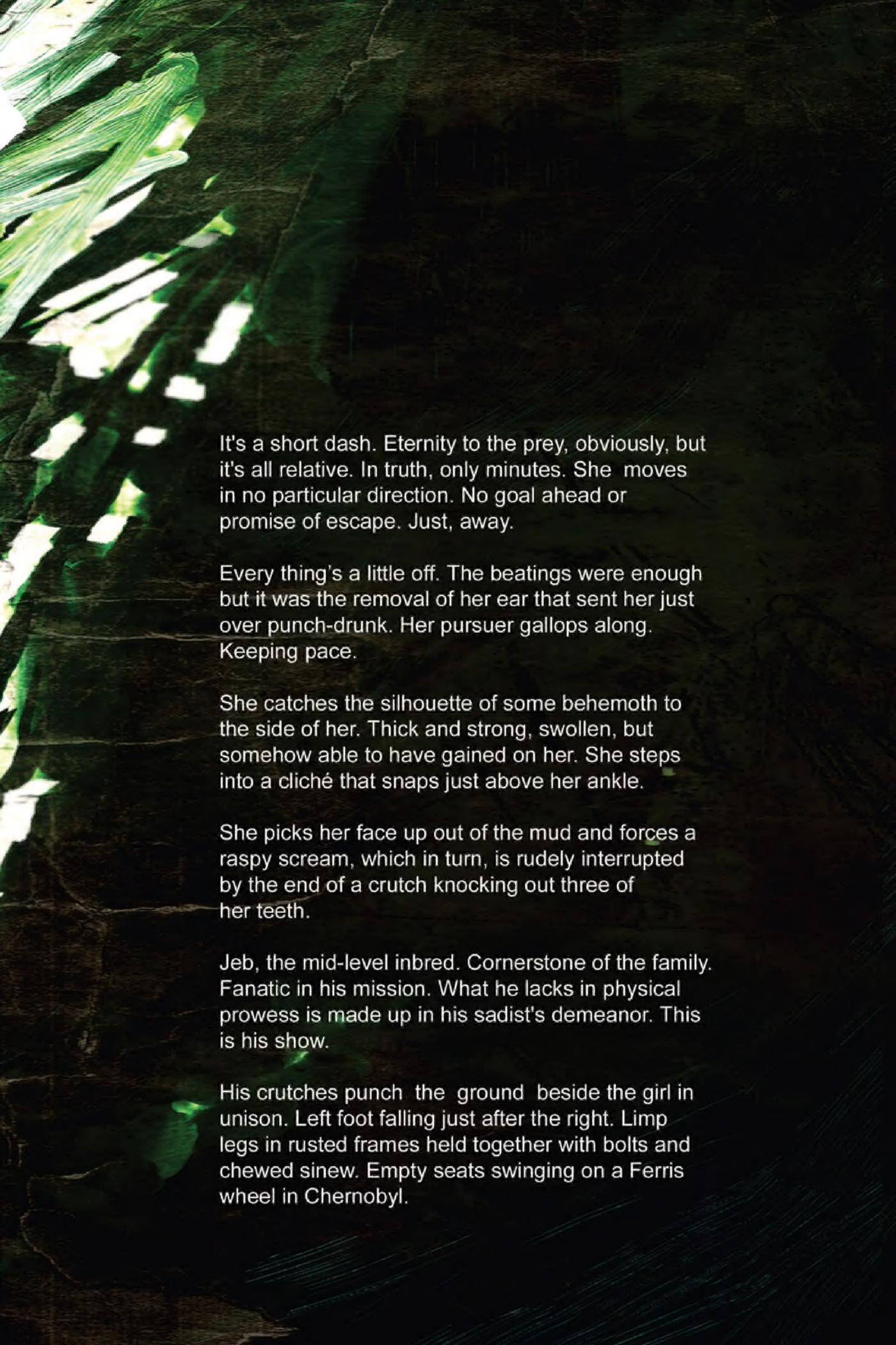
A breeze carries across the plains. The grass sways, stiff.

Another scream, this one carries a little longer than the last before it's cut off right at the peak of its crecsendo. It's quiet again. Nothing, for just another second.

Cut to black.

A laugh in the darkness as muffled and distant as the scream.

This is where the animated blood pours down the screen revealing the title.



It's a short dash. Eternity to the prey, obviously, but it's all relative. In truth, only minutes. She moves in no particular direction. No goal ahead or promise of escape. Just, away.

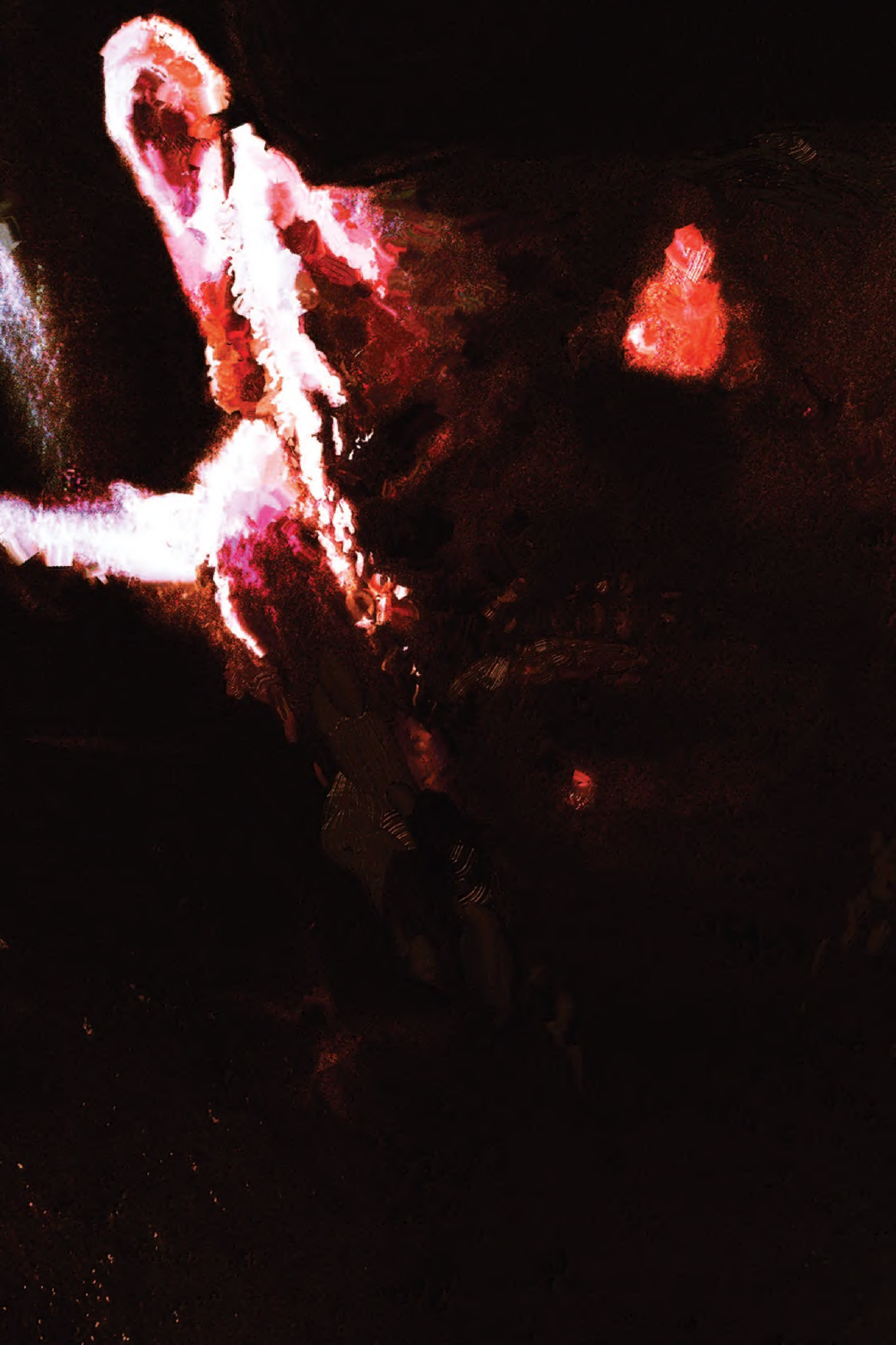
Every thing's a little off. The beatings were enough but it was the removal of her ear that sent her just over punch-drunk. Her pursuer gallops along. Keeping pace.

She catches the silhouette of some behemoth to the side of her. Thick and strong, swollen, but somehow able to have gained on her. She steps into a cliché that snaps just above her ankle.

She picks her face up out of the mud and forces a raspy scream, which in turn, is rudely interrupted by the end of a crutch knocking out three of her teeth.

Jeb, the mid-level inbred. Cornerstone of the family. Fanatic in his mission. What he lacks in physical prowess is made up in his sadist's demeanor. This is his show.

His crutches punch the ground beside the girl in unison. Left foot falling just after the right. Limp legs in rusted frames held together with bolts and chewed sinew. Empty seats swinging on a Ferris wheel in Chernobyl.



Jeb's body is punishing him now for putting so much strain on his impotent legs and undersized right lung. He hangs his weight on the crutches enduring the fire running through him.

It's worth it.

When she regains consciousness and succumbs to the stark reality her sprint got her nowhere, those tears, that's the part that makes it worth this burning.

He endures it for terror's sake. It makes him feel that big.

He nods the hulking figure over.

The big dumb one. The one that doesn't talk. The one that just breaks things in tantrums. Usually people. The third-generation inbred. Jeb's executioner.

This is Ben. The one slinging the estrogen wreckage over his shoulder.

There is a house sitting many, many acres in from an unmapped road. Many, many miles away from a rarely traveled road. The kind of house you come to when your tire blows within walking distance of Jeb's Automotive.

It hasn't been painted in thirty-seven years. Every charming feature has given way to sun damage. To termites and mold. To the disgusting creatures that live here.

Towards the back of the house, inside, just before a short and wide hall that leads to the kitchen, is an equally unattended dining room. Inside of the dining room are four guest that have received the only attention given to anything in or out of this house.

Four of them at the table. The two boyfriends. Their two girlfriends. All tied up. Wrists and ankles bound to their chairs with the kind of wire that cuts. The kind that shows just how much they've struggled. All bleeding from various wounds delivered to their heads with blunt objects. Mascara running. Messy hair. Glossy with sweat.

Fodder. If you needed to know their names, you would.

They don't struggle very much now. Almost glad they have a chance to sit. They've all accepted their fate and written each other off as dead. They hum exhausted through the gags in their mouths. It's tedious.

To the rest, another night at the table. Victims present. Quiet never really settles in.

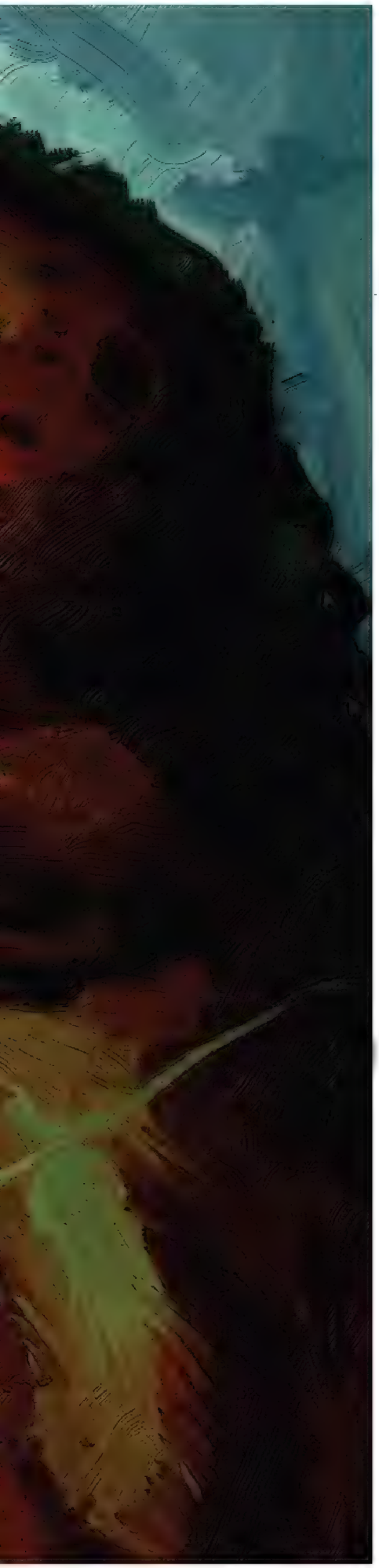
Grandma. The corpse.

Maybe.

Still meaty. Not enough to keep her leathery skin from drooping all over her. Eye sockets sit sagging behind stained glasses secured by some other woman's string of pearls.

They fell out, her eyes, or maybe removed. No telling. Neither would surprise. In the right proximity to Grandma you can actually smell them; her eye sockets. They have an odor like no other. Indescribable. Awkward and unpleasant. The grip it takes on the gag reflex doesn't choke because it's pungent but just because of knowing where it comes from.

The self-righteous puritan that put Jeb at the head of this table.



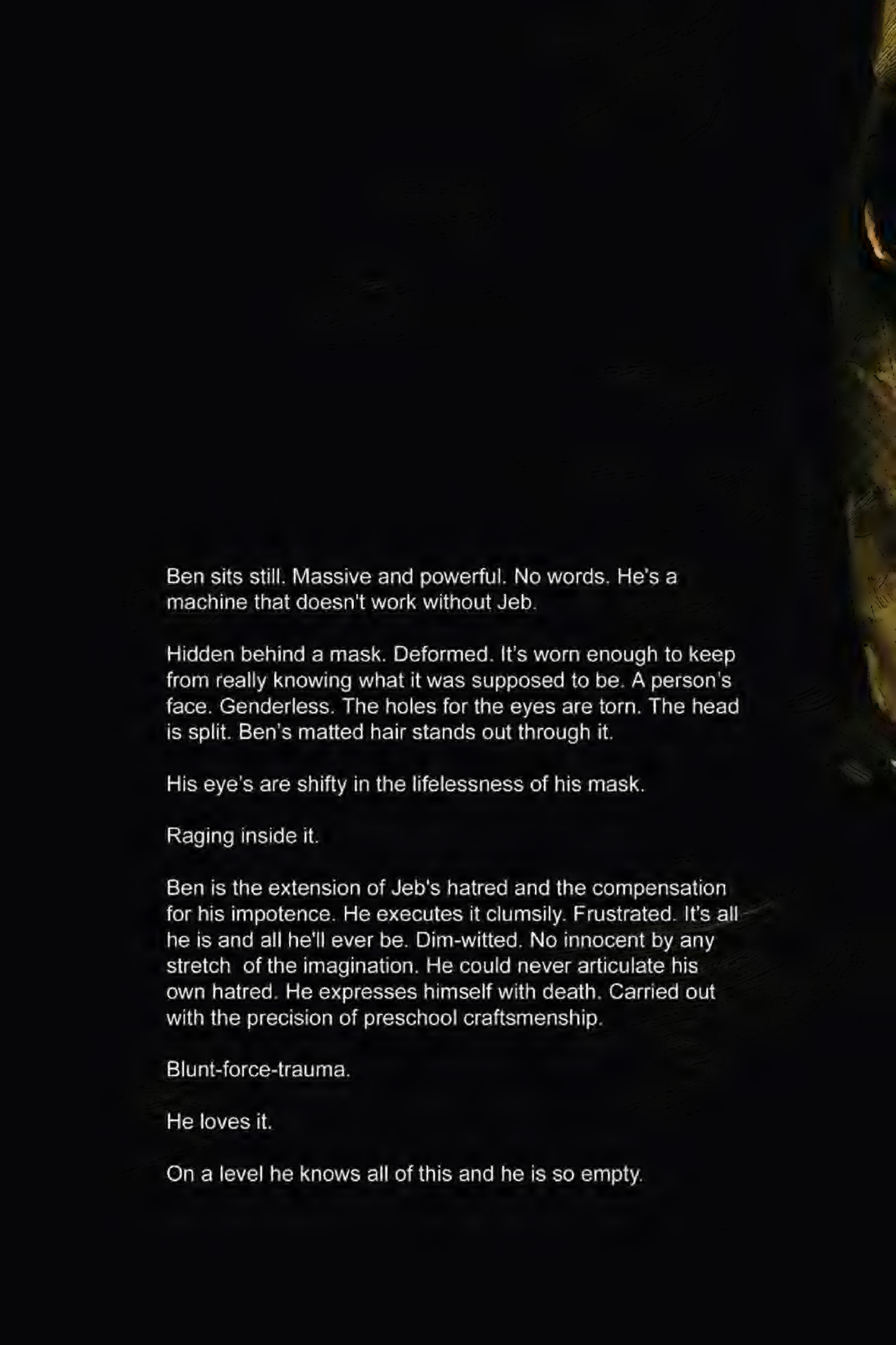
Jeremy. Ben's gargantuan sibling.

The swine.

Obese. Morbidly obese. A wiry beard has had a hard time growing through those fat cheeks. Thin enough to see his shining, greasy face and bloated lips. Thick enough to display the souvenirs of meals past.

There is a bib cascading down his torso. No discernible logo or clever statement. It's been painted in spills and sauce and blood. A brick-red slip-and-slide. A tarp that has become so tight his neck has begun to swallow it.

Unlike his brother, the latter portion of his defective anatomy is internal. Outside of his odd number of fingers pinching in meal-time anticipation, the rest has either been lost or smeared in his size.



Ben sits still. Massive and powerful. No words. He's a machine that doesn't work without Jeb.

Hidden behind a mask. Deformed. It's worn enough to keep from really knowing what it was supposed to be. A person's face. Genderless. The holes for the eyes are torn. The head is split. Ben's matted hair stands out through it.

His eye's are shifty in the lifelessness of his mask.

Raging inside it.

Ben is the extension of Jeb's hatred and the compensation for his impotence. He executes it clumsily. Frustrated. It's all he is and all he'll ever be. Dim-witted. No innocent by any stretch of the imagination. He could never articulate his own hatred. He expresses himself with death. Carried out with the precision of preschool craftsmenship.

Blunt-force-trauma.

He loves it.

On a level he knows all of this and he is so empty.

Along the back wall sit the seven siblings of Ben and Jeremy.

Along the wall.

On a single shelf.

In seven jars.

All a third trimester old.

All too broken to have made it any farther.

One more seat, empty. This is Mother's. Everyone calls her Mama, even Jeb, whom she calls Daddy, again, like everyone else. Everyone except Ben or Jeremy or Grandma. They don't speak.

Mother is unassuming. The woman that you'd expect makes delicious cookies. Mrs. Clause in a dated, flowery dress that beckons the accolades of women sipping tea while wearing similarly flowery dresses. Mrs. Clause, other than the hairs around her lips. The ones that hang stiff and point in different directions when she talks.

Mrs. Clause, other than just about everything else about her.

She'll be at the table in a minute with dinner. She'll be bringing out a large bowl of the fifth friend. The odd one out that didn't make it to the table as a guest.

Mother slops stew into a series of very nice Victorian china. Dusty though. It seems that washing the dishes isn't required prior to serving poorly cleaned pieces of your friend.

These kids, the guests, fastened to the chairs, had accepted their fates as dead. Just hoping it came quick when it did.

Relentless, seizing the opportunity to get them panicked Jeb points out the very trendy Japanese symbol tattoo on a piece of meat in the blonde's bowl. The whole quintet had one. They all received them during their last spring break. This eternal mark solidified their friendship, although it actually means "tree".

Round twelve goes to Jeb and they tug their arms a little more.

Their chairs rock and bounce. They twist and jerk. Each of them throws their head back to rest just a moment at varied points during the little dance. Jeremy's fat gut rolls with his deep, amused laughter. Mother rolls her eyes. Jeb smiles, to himself, he thinks himself so clever.

The excitement rolls off his tongue reciting the lines of a square-dance routine accompanied by poorly timed clapping.

Ben becomes uneasy. His grip is splintering the edges of the table.

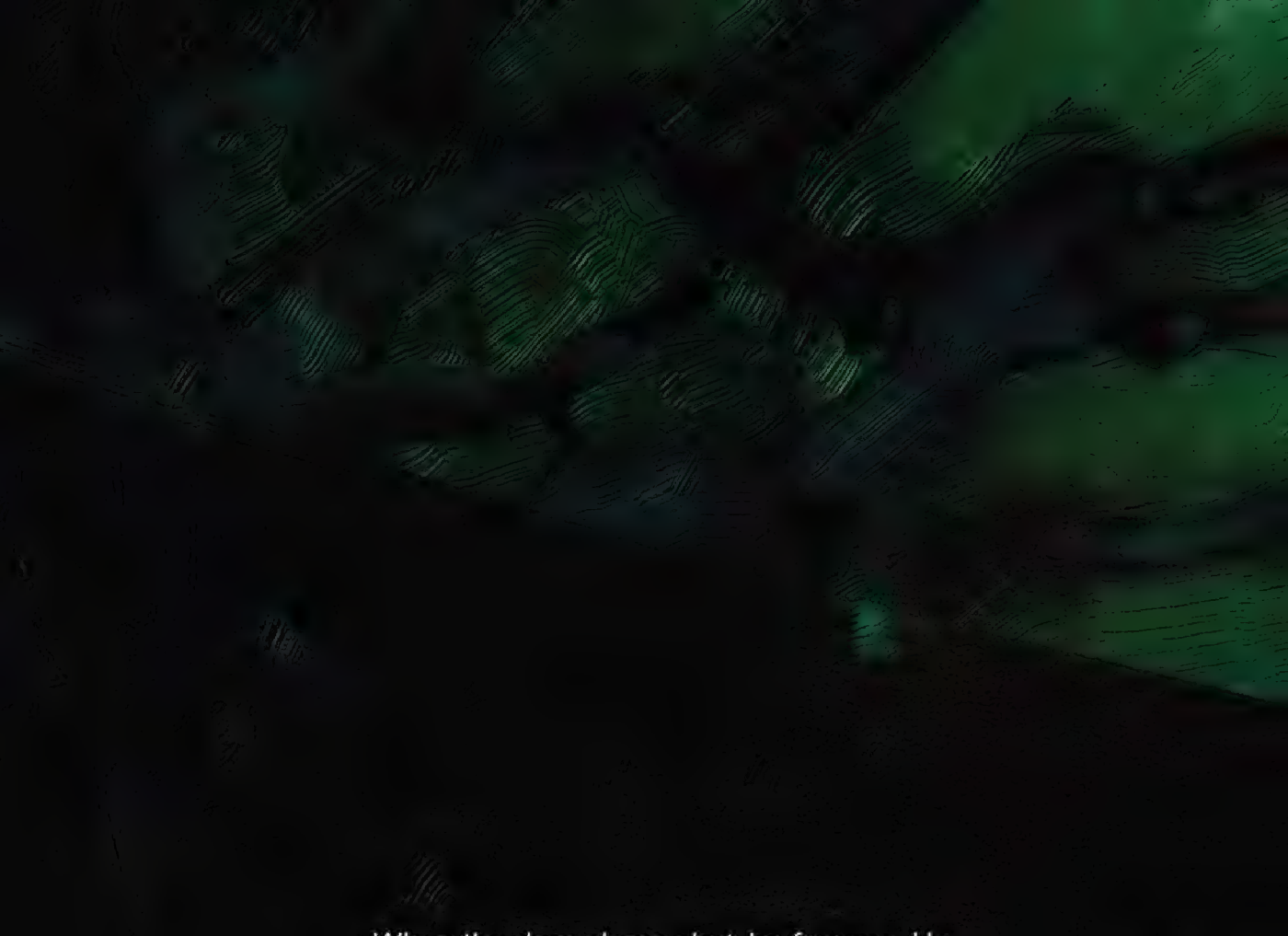
Annoyed at his guests' lack of enthusiasm, his poorly tuned southern song is now an angry southern rage. The saliva in his mouth turns into flying, foamy spit when it passes through his clenched teeth. It's getting on the food. He scolds the reluctance of his guests to eat their friend, it's disrespectful.

Mother nods, agreeing, spoon feeding Grandma. Jeremy is distracted with his meal. Ben is distressed. He wants to punish them. Jeb's climactic rage is disrupted with a crash from behind their home. Nothing catastrophic, but heard. Mother orders Jeb out. Apparently he hasn't kept the raccoons out at promised. Cane in hand, he grins, winks; it's reassuring.

The shed. The barn. The museum. The trophy room.

The door opens. Moonlight washes in. How it stays on the hinges, no one knows. The room is an organized dump. This is the place where you find one of those automotive micro-cemeteries. A dank, moth-ridden thrift store. Rusted barrels. Jars with small bits of things in yellow fluid. All of the things that create one big, scary ambiance.

Jeb shuffles around prodding with his cane. He concots witty little tongue-in-cheek threats. He chuckles at his remarks. He spots a shelf that seems to have collapsed and curses. He has no idea what exactly has fallen from the shelf and broken on the work table just below it. It irritates him none-the-less. Squinting, searching for the culprit. Rust or rot, whatever it is he'll never fix it anyway.



When the door slams shut he freezes. He freezes and looks to the right without turning his head as if that would allow him to see what's there. Jeb's gut is telling him to run. There are eyes on him. He knows it.

A million fingers crawl up his back, his neck, under his skin. His hair stands on end. The lump in his throat is tempting him to vomit.

No. No, he'll puff up. He'll look big and he'll be loud. Ben will come.

Shoulders cocked he turns, growling.

A mountain rises up and moves towards him. Fast. A blur. Wide-eyed, Jeb is dangling a good distance off the ground. Trying to figure out what bones have just been broken.

Everything hurts.

Jeb isn't dead yet, just, not moving. Not talking. No more of Jeb's banter. There is too much swelling around his mouth right now. Brittle bodies like this don't require so much pressure to start breaking the framework.

This night was set in motion long ago.

There is no way out. He hasn't realized it yet. He will.

There's a ribbon of blood and teeth he's tonguing out of his mouth. Arms as useless as his legs. Pissed pants. Tied up in a sprawling oak high in the shadow of the leaves. In the dark.

Finding out he isn't God.

The air in the house is stagnant. It stays just as strong when the door in the kitchen opens. No plan on leaving anytime soon. The humidity is sweltering and still. Just as bad in the house as out. The clicking of insects attempting to penetrate the light bulbs is white noise here.

Every passing moment fuels the anticipation of that door closing. Daddy coming back to the table.

It doesn't happen.

Mother sends Ben out to retrieve Daddy. The foursome is united, unknowingly, in a prayer that their bodies fail them. Leaving this place in the quiet of Jeb's absence. Uneasy with the lapse of time, Mother begins to direct Jeremy towards the family room.

Her little fingers dial and push the controls of some boxed contraption driving and even larger wheeled contraption which carries an even larger mutant. It's going to buckle under the weight. Not now, but in about two more weeks, tops. Just not right now.

With Jeremy positioned, she turns on a television. It glows brilliantly in Technicolor distortion. Indiscernible audio. Animated. A stimulant. Enough for the fat man to enjoy. Eyes glazed over, enamored by the display, Mother begins the sponge bath.

This always comes just before she brings him to her breast. Just before sleep.

He coos in anticipation.

Lovely and disgusting all at once.

Ninety-nine inches of stacked meat passing as Kevlar is relaxing on the wide frame of a very calm and collected giant. The floor boards barely creaked under the three hundred and ten pounds on them. Who could have known such a mass could be so stealthy.

Clothes torn and blood stained. Traveled. Too small. No regard for style. A blunt weapon. Custom. A flat-edged and flat-topped brute sword. Must have been made from a fender. A very high regard for execution.

Thick plastic wrapping stretched and pulled around his head. Tight. Stapled and nailed in place. A skewed seam along the back.

Gaping hole in the throat. Hot air moving in and out has a little stream running onto the neckline of the t-shirt. Time leaves stains all down the front.

Lucas is, for the most part, a silhouette blocking a good deal of the light from passing into the dining room from the kitchen. His movement, the gesture he makes, intends no harm towards the four dinner guests.

They keep still. They keep quiet. However, not to convenience the impending rescue, maybe not impending, but supposed. They are frozen because what stands in front of them is so absolute in the death he will deliver they cannot feel anything but the odor of decay swim beneath their skin.

It empties their guts making room for fear. It chokes them. Dries their mouths. Puts tears in their eyes. Their jaws tense while all of the bugs and rodents flee the home. Everything goes a little darker. Even the light tries to hide.

The younger of the two boyfriends is pissing himself.

Lucas picks up Grandma. His hand swallows her head. Without a sound he descends. Her arms move a little. Her right index finger twitches. She seems to be disagreeing with Lucas' decision to snatch her up.

More so, it seems, she's not a corpse after all.

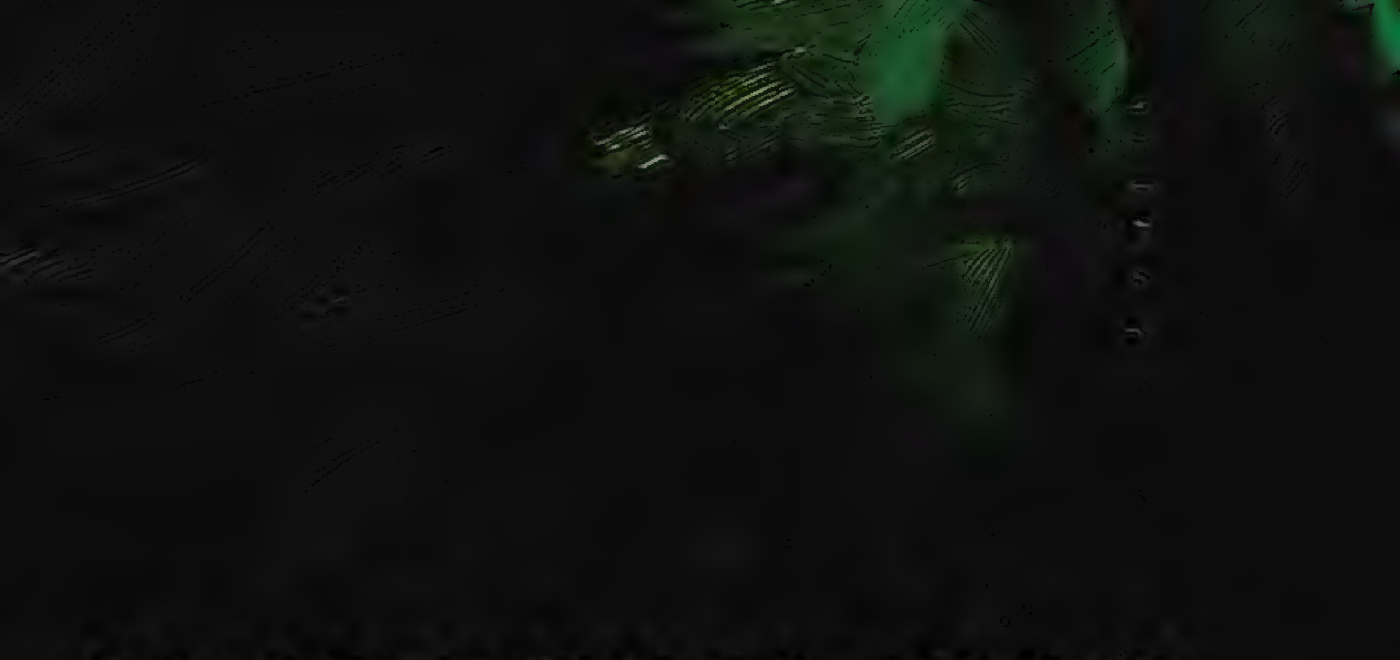
Ben's basement is so unkempt. So dark. Damp. Unfinished.

If there were an exactness to Ben's killing then the sterility of white drywall and sea foam green industrial tile would make sense. The tools would be surgical steel and he'd extend the courtesy of a cushioned table so those about to die could relax. But the people that Ben kills aren't lending their organs to the resurrection of some loss.

Ben's basement is rotting frames and beams. Broken pipes and puddles. Dirt and gravel and old bone that has been trampled into sand. Ben's basement is a slaughterhouse that is feeding a pack of dogs. A place that amplifies the blind rage carried out with hammers and saws. Ben's quiet place. The stairs leading down are lined with shredded wallpaper. Underlined with fingernail studded baseboards. Warmed with the light coming in from around the door and the forty-watt bulb dangling over the landing. Audio provided by Grandma's heels bumping each step.

Lifeless.

Lucas was gentle, but his hand enveloping her face was enough, it seems.



Lucas drags her through, one side to the other towards the two-thirds of a body hanging on a hook just past the table covered in one-third of a body and several knives.

Grandma's ever present stillness at the table was constant for Ben. Solid. Stability. Safety. Lucas thought pulling her skin off and throwing it over the hanging two-thirds of that fifth friend would be a nice touch. Upsetting.

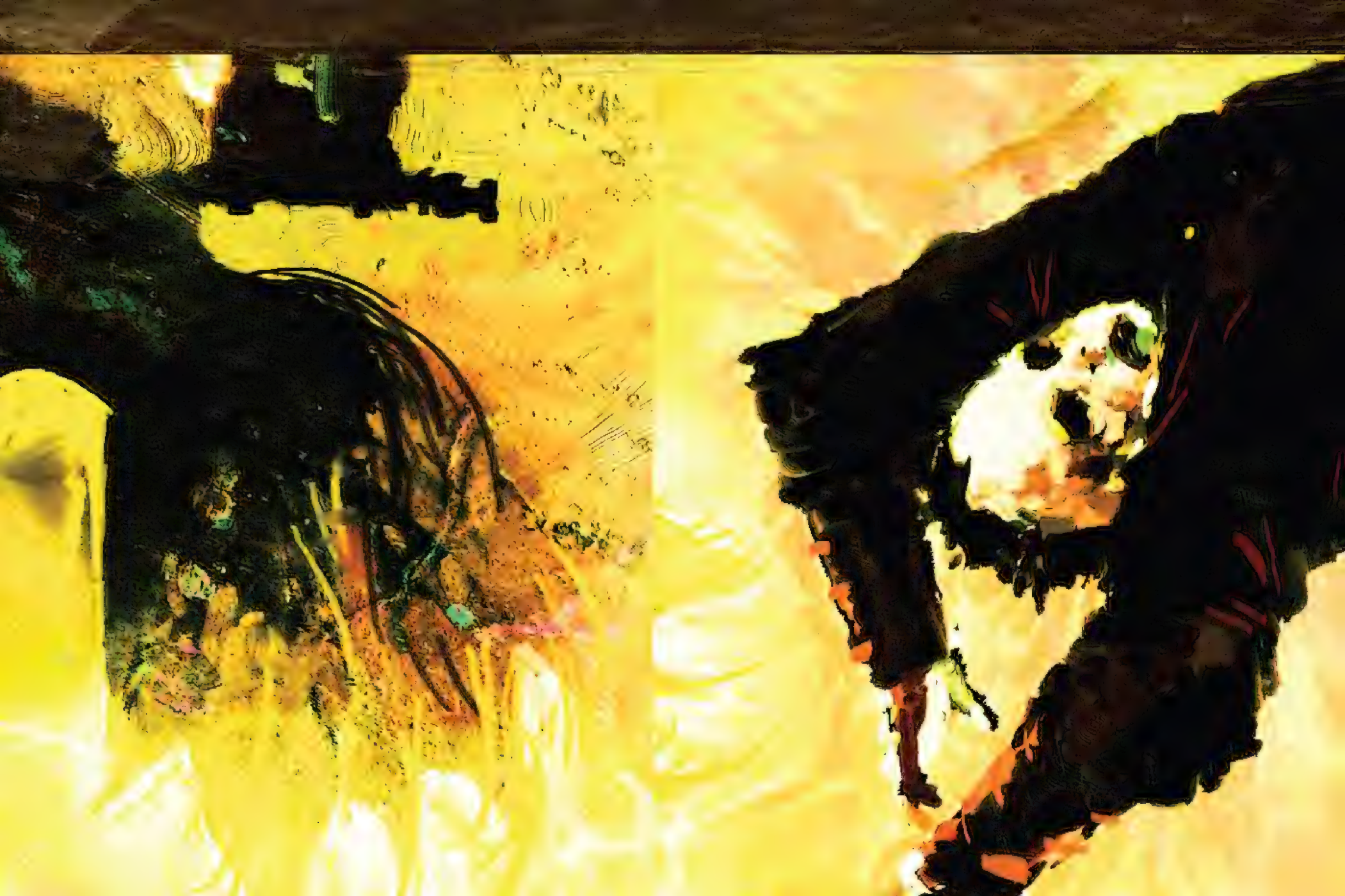
In eight more minutes Ben will surrender his search for Daddy. He will be scolded by Mother for failing to return with him when he sees her at the table. He will endure the scolding because Daddy is in-fact missing and his perfect little world is being disrupted.

He's taking quick steps towards the kitchen door to outrun the chill running down his spine. It is unfamiliar and more discomforting than Mother's scolding will be. He just wants to get out of the dark because it is frightening him.

But in five minutes Lucas will disappear at the end of the basement stairs. Three minutes before Ben gets back inside and panics. Three minutes before Ben finds Mama has already left with Jeremy. Three minutes before he isn't greeted by an expected scolding but by the absence of Grandma. Three minutes before he stands in confusion staring through the hole in Grandma's chair, into the overflowing bedpan below the seat she never got out of. Three minutes before everything is confirmed to be out of routine and he starts to shake.

Ben's fingers curl and kink. Chest expanding in and out. Full breaths. A bit of groaning rolling around somewhere in his throat. His knees buckle, but just a bit.

One arm lashes out and grabs the back of the blond girl's chair while the other stands out ahead, stiff. In an instant he's at the basement door throwing her down the stairs as violently as the confined space will allow.



The girl, in her chair, carwheels in to the darkness but doesn't land. No crash. No chair-bound girl tumbling and collapsing the crates stacked three high, eleven feet past the landing.

Mother calls out, questioning the noise, tucking herself back behind the apron. She waits a moment for a response that never comes as if Ben, the mute, could deliver. Her attention turns to Jeremy. He is spitting up. She begrudgingly surrenders time to wipe his face, quietly enraged that Ben is not as still and well-behaved as his siblings in the jars.

Ben's actions are frenzied. There is blood in the air and the animals can smell it. Ben charges down the stairs to find the blonde.

Mother scurries into the dining room. She finds the blonde missing. Grandma is missing. The heirloom buffet has encored one fresh ten inch gouge on its left; Ben.

Mother is going to pass Jeremy and head upstairs to collect long sticks from a bundle that she is going to consecutively break over Ben's knuckles. This bundle of long sticks is kept for such occasions. But she doesn't. Doesn't pass Jeremy but stops, interrupted by the sight of that lard trembling underneath Grandma's dress.

Mama freezes, almost completely in sync with Ben's stillness at the end of the basement stairs as he gazes upon Grandma's skin hanging in the back.

Apparently Ben sees just fine down there in the dark.

Ben runs upstairs to his mother. He wants to tell her what he's found. He instead stands behind her huffing and puffing, failing to communicate his terrible discovery.

Mother moves in slow motion, shutting Ben out, pulling the dress off of Jeremy. The blood has caused a bit of the pattern to run.

The television has dimmed. Jeremy stares, paralyzed and silent. Mother stares, behind her, Ben follows her gaze. The three of them stare into the upper-right corner of the screen where Lucas stares back.

This is an awkward moment for them.

Ben, dumbfounded. Staring through the cold face strapped to his head. The collective hollowness of their souls. The thing they've become. He's the place they hide.

The ambassador of their corporate evil.

Mother bares her teeth growling instruction to Ben, sure of him. Ben turns and takes four wide strides. Each step a small tremor.

Ben, so sure of himself.

Mother turns to face Lucas from behind Ben's right. The scowl she put together before she turned around fell off in disbelief as she saw the table in the dining room vacant.

Mother's hands drew up towards her face to conceal her light gasp when Ben grabbed the hatchet out of his belt and reared back to strike, because Lucas did nothing.

Mother flexed her muscles turning Jeremy in his chair for the door right after Ben's hand came down into Lucas'.

She felt her back breaking as she shoved Jeremy towards the door while Ben was lifted into the air by Lucas.

Lucas' left had Ben's right. His left hand's digits being driven into Ben's chest. The kind of grip that leaves marks. Maybe permanent.

Ben grunts and squirms. Wiggling around in Lucas' checkmate.

Mother climbs over the mountainous Jeremy and out the front door. She tugs on the thick bib. He spills out onto the porch. Ben flies through the family room wall into the half-bath. Through the bathroom wall into the study. Into the study, into a desk which slides with Ben into the wall.

Mother is not sure of anything anymore. None of them are. Jeremy is a drooling infant. Struggling. A killer like his brother. Once. Feral. A devil in his prime. Before his stomach hung low with so much weight over his legs he could no longer walk.

Rolling around on his belly in a fat-suit. His spoils. Face purple with the thick, thick, thickness pressing his heart. Lobster hands pinching at something to grab. Something he can use to pull himself through the doorway. He'd go sliding down the stairs like a walrus on ice into the water. He grabs his mother's hands and achieves only pulling her back in.

Heavy steel grinds as it's pulled off that dining room table. Dinner falls on the floor. Lucas is not careful to keep from breaking the china.

Mother frowns and lets Jeremy go. Lucas takes four wide strides. Each step a mid-sized tremor. Each coming a little faster than the last. His momentum picks up. His fifth step is a bit of a hop.

Jeremy's eyes open so wide that you can see a bit of the white. The fifty-one inch custom blade falls through the ceiling. Dust and plaster, splinters, showering down proceeding the blade.

Some of Jeremy lands on his mother. She has to remove her glasses. His obesity caves in on the blade. It's withdrawn against some opposing suction.

Mother is running, Lucas is watching.

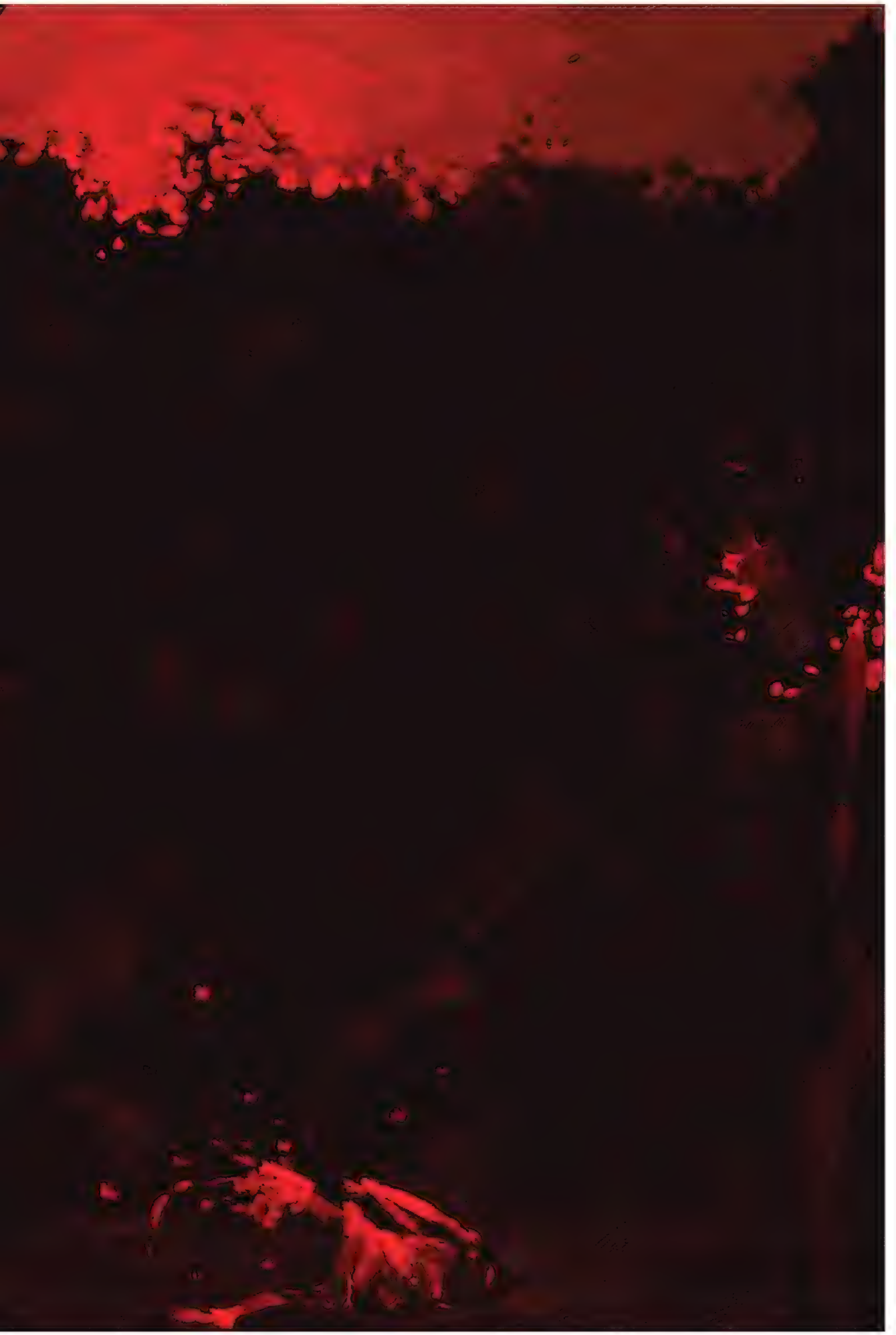
Ben is regaining consciousness.

Mother steps into a cliché that snaps just above her ankle. She pulls her face out of the mud, screaming.

More anger than hurt.

There is still a paring knife in the pocket of her apron. The knee-jerk instinct to hide her sin is stronger than her aged instinct to exercise patience. She starts cutting. Screaming.

More hurt than anger.



Ben is raising a ruckus in an attached tool shed. Arming himself.

Lucas is perched on the roof. Brute-sword resting across his knees. Watching Ben raise a ruckus. Hearing Mother scream in the thinly grown trees and tall grass seventy-two yards out.

Lucas takes mind of the quiet where the two boyfriends and their two girlfriends are hiding.

His heart is giving that stillness to his grandmother, but that story is for another time.

A chance where there wasn't one. In good faith, he anticipates their patience keeping them calm until the darkness retreats with sunrise. Lest they cross Ben with his chain and sledgehammer ready, heading towards his mother's call.

Lucas returns to the oak. Jeb is fighting. The rope is a little looser.

Struggling. Jaw broken and slack. Wincing every time he pulls against the restraints. His brain sending needles to his torn muscles every time he squirms. He rejects the reflexes and his body's insistence that he stop.

It's getting him nowhere. He has no plan. If he broke free, his broken body would fall to the ground and refuse to move anyways.

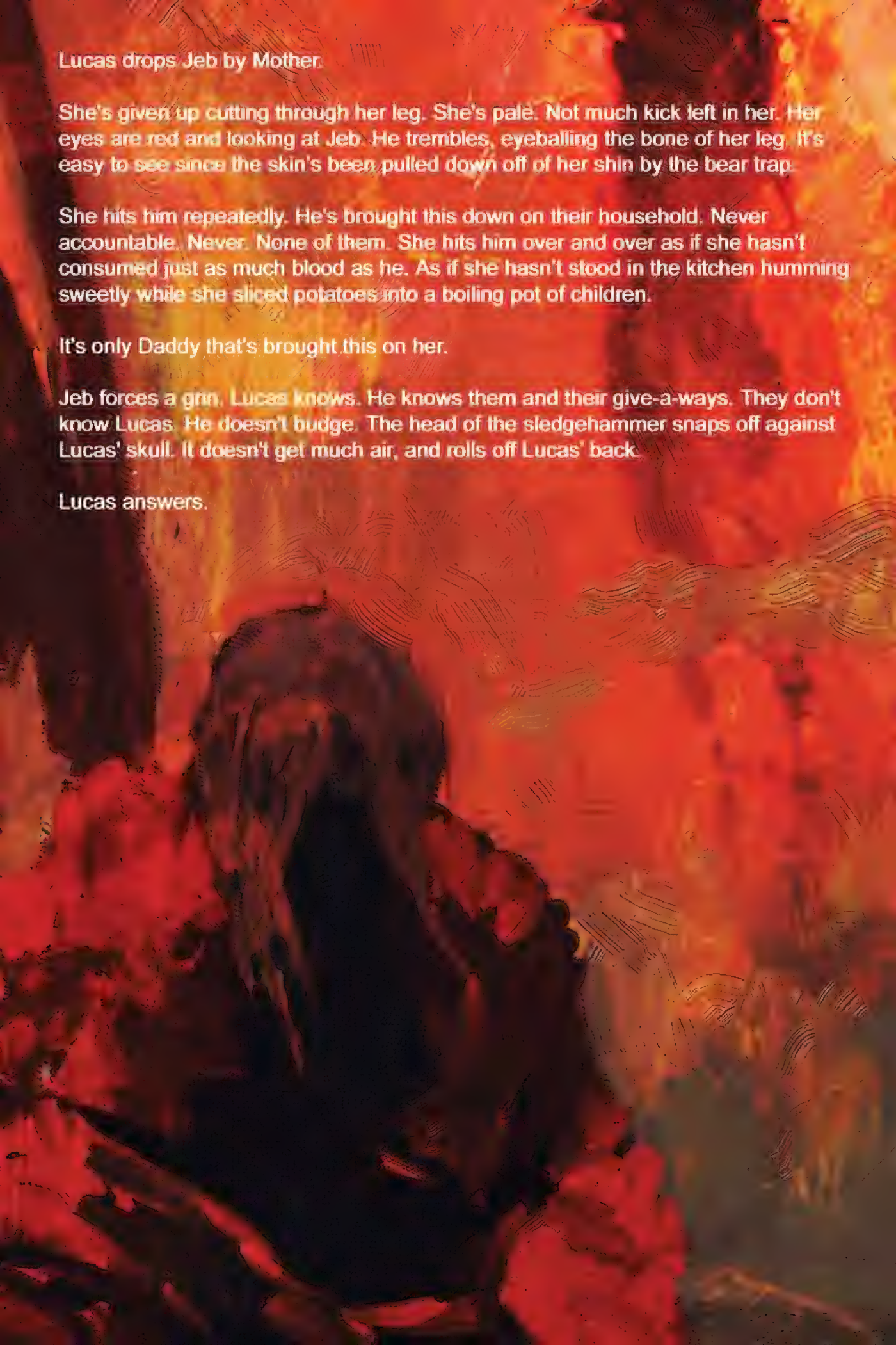
Lucas pulls him down.

Cue *Last Ap Roach*, from Squarepusher's *Music Is Rotted One Note*.

He walks into the shadows dragging Jeb behind him. Jeb huffs and puffs and gargles obscenities.

Somewhere in the dark Ben is waiting. He wants Lucas to think he's gone to aide his mother. When Lucas arrives he won't find him there. He'll spring his trap.

Lucas, aware of this, couldn't care less.



Lucas drops Jeb by Mother.

She's given up cutting through her leg. She's pale. Not much kick left in her. Her eyes are red and looking at Jeb. He trembles, eyeballing the bone of her leg. It's easy to see since the skin's been pulled down off of her shin by the bear trap.

She hits him repeatedly. He's brought this down on their household. Never accountable. Never. None of them. She hits him over and over as if she hasn't consumed just as much blood as he. As if she hasn't stood in the kitchen humming sweetly while she sliced potatoes into a boiling pot of children.

It's only Daddy that's brought this on her.

Jeb forces a grin. Lucas knows. He knows them and their give-a-ways. They don't know Lucas. He doesn't budge. The head of the sledgehammer snaps off against Lucas' skull. It doesn't get much air, and rolls off Lucas' back.

Lucas answers.

Ben feels his ankles being crushed. Each in one of Lucas' corresponding hands. Cracking. He watches everything turn sideways. the trees are spinning. Ben can't draw his hands in against the velocity.

The wind in his ears just starts to crescendo.

A shower of bark dusts Ben's face. It gets in his eyes.

Jeb ignores the entire event. He's finally realized the inevitability of it.

He watches Lucas reach in, grab Mama's neck.

He surveys his mighty son's mangled body.

Mother, her panic, the pain in her face from Lucas' grip. She's going to die now. Lucas sticks her face close to Jeb's. She tries to pry his fingers off. Her tongue crawling out. Choking.

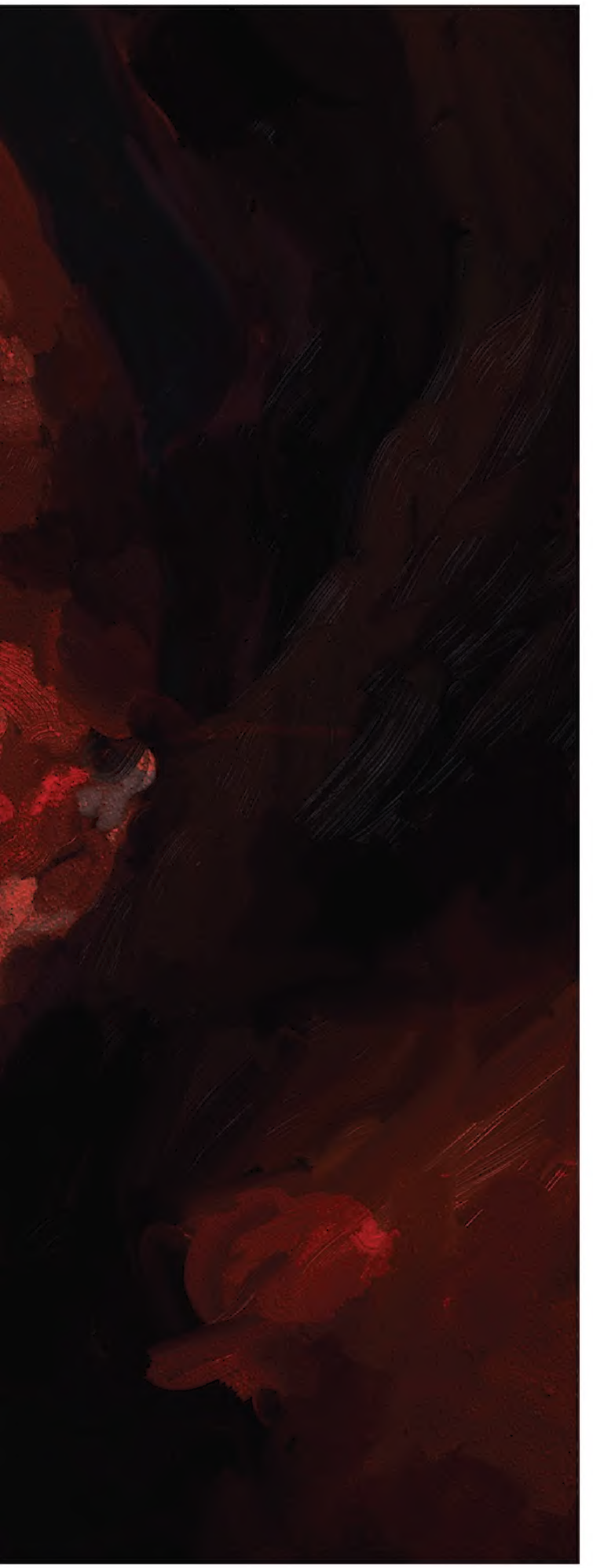
Jeb wants to help but he can't move. Lucas breaks her neck.

Lucas just drops her.

The totality of this nothingness. Humid steaming air. Hot. Blood and sweat there in the pile of killers. Lucas looming over Jeb. Staring down with that lifeless plastic-wrapped face. Tracheotomy passing air steadily. As calm as can be.

The sun has broken through and everything has emerged from the darkness in an amber hue.

Bugs buzzing over the heap of flesh at Lucas' feet.



Jeb just stares at Lucas. He wonders if this is how the skyscrapers look in the city.

In the backwoods farmland of Rural-Nowhere USA there is screaming, sobbing, then silence. A breeze washes over a sea of grass. One group of nameless, college-aged fodder becomes the plaything of The Family. Cannibalistic sadists. Evil and cliché all at once. The day retreats. Night falls. Amid the torture and terror a killer arrives. Lucas. Massive, resolved, the nightmare of nightmares. Over the remaining hours of the night Lucas usurps The Family's reign. He overtakes their home, their routine, their confidence. He sends their twisted world in to chaos. One by one, the family bows to the finality of the judgment come against them.

In the backwoods farmland of Rural-Nowhere USA, dawn breaks. It's coloring everything warmly. Red and gold and orange. A clutch of dried and dead trees is framing a pile of bodies.

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